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ABSTRACT

Parents' involvement in their children's schooling can be justified on various ideological, psychological, philosophical, and educational grounds. Two dominant attitudes prevail toward parent participation: (1) the authoritarian-paternalistic view featuring a one-way teacher-parent relationship; and (2) the parents-as-equal-partners view. The first approach predominates when parents are immigrants. Although parents often become actively involved with controversial social and political issues, their participation is usually limited to extracurricular activities, PTA, and social entertainment programs. Curricular matters are left to teachers and administrators. This paper aims to analyze and interpret Israeli parents' involvement in curricular decisions in two cases: (1) "Supplementary Programmes," a provision of the State Education Law of 1953 granting parents the right to determine 25 percent of their children's school curriculum; and (2) school desegregation, a 1968 policy designed to promote integration of school children of diverse ethnic origins. While parents have been actively involved in school integration, they have generally not chosen to influence curriculum content, aims, methods, or teaching staff and administrators. A few notable exceptions are listed, including the founding of traditional nonorthodox schools, reinforcement of Judaic studies in certain religious state schools, and the founding of a school geared to labor movement values. Clearly, the pattern of parental school involvement in Israel needs to be radically transformed from paternalism to a more mutually interactive approach. A new Ministry of Education and Culture committee has recommended four strategies for change. Included are 25 references. (MLH)

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PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN CURRICULAR DECISIONS - THE CASE OF THE "SUPPLEMENTARY PROGRAMMES" IN ISRAEL

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Parents Involvement in Curricular Decisions - The Case of the "Supplementary Programmes" in Israel

Introduction

Parents' involvement in the schooling processes of their children could be justified on various grounds (Lightfoot, 1978; Berger, 1981; Comer, 1980; Haigh, 1975):

1. Ideological-Political - the need to bridge the evolving gulf between the individual and his family. This is a result of demographic, economic, cultural and educational dramatic changes in the function of the family.
2. Psychological - teachers need to know their students' interaction within the family and their sociocultural background which affects their behavior and cognitive performance in school.
3. Social-Philosophical - a democratic and pluralistic society is expected to acknowledge its members' right to multiculturalism and to facilitate its freedom of expression and action.
4. Educational - the need to stimulate and intensify immigrant- parents' socialization and to enhance the effectiveness of interaction with their children.

Two dominant attitudes prevail toward parents involvement in schools and especially if they are immigrants. The first acknowledges the important role of parents in the education of their children, however, their culture is conceived as inferior. Therefore they have to be "educated", "guided" and "changed" in order to bring them up to the higher usually Western dominant culture which prevails in schools as far as aim, content and methods are concerned. This attitude sees the parents as a means to achieve social and educational ends beyond the parents and is therefore characterised by one way teacher-parent relationship.

The parent is a passive receipient of the teachers' guidance and schools directions. The second approach sees the parents as equal partners of the teachers in the education of their children and in their involvement as a process of mutual interaction with the educational system.

In an anthropological study of a California school, John Ogbu (1974) points out that relationships between the school and the community are sporadic and limited in scope. Parent and community involvement in schools, he writes, are usually limited to extracurricular activities, PTA and open house meetings and other social-entertainment programs, rather than involvement in vital matters such as "making decisions concerning the school curriculum or new programs" (Ogbu 1974). Fein (1971) suggests that although the extent of community participation or control over schools may vary, nevertheless, in general, parents and other community members are content to leave schooling to the teachers and school administrators.

However, the traditional apathy of parents towards schools often breaks down when schools become actively involved in contemporary social and political issues. Most parents may not get involved when curricular issues are on the agenda but they become actively involved in regard to issues such as drawing school boundries, zonning or busing pupils. Indeed, school desegreagation, or rather school integration as it is referred to in Israel, is an example of how social and political issues bring the school and its various community groups of parents into an intensive relationship.

The aim of this paper is to analyse and interpret parents' involvement in curricular decisions in Israel in two cases: the case of the "Supplementary Programmes", a provision of the State Education Law of 1953 which grants the parents a right to determine 25 percent of their childrens school curriculum. The other case in which parents' involvement in curricular decisions will be examined is the case of school desegregation, a policy designed to promote integration in schools of children of diverse ethnic origin within school. This policy is an outcome of the School Reform Act of 1968 (Glasman, 1983).

Integration

As noted in comparative studies, the particular social-ethnic conditions in Israel are different from those in the United States. As a result, Israel's experience in the field of ethnic relations differs in many respects (Amir and Sharan, 1984). Israel's Jewish population is almost equally divided between persons of Western origin (European, American and South African) who are considered the "majority" group and those of Eastern or oriental origin (Moslem countries of the Middle East), who constitute the "minority" group. Also, the ethnic differences in Israel are not easily distinguishable by physical characteristics such as skin color. Despite their diverse origin, all groups avow their national-ethnic religious identity with the Jewish people who share a common history (Iram, 1985).

The School Reform introduced in 1968 had two sets of aims, educational and social: 1. To raise the level of academic achievement, particularly of the disadvantaged, in order to close th educational gap between ethnic and socio-economic groups, and 2. to encourage social integration among students of different origins and backgrounds within the school framework (Rimalt, 1971; Iram, 1987). The Ministry of Education and Culture initiated organized integration by the formation of integrated Junior High Schools.

As the literature indicates, community responses to integration programs vary from total opposition to active acceptance and cooperation, with a great many shades in-between (Crain et al, 1968; Mayer et al. 1974; Gerard and Miller, 1975; Amir and Sharan, 1984). Whatever the response, however, normally the school-community relationship becomes intense with more activity. The Israeli experience in school desegregation of Western and Middle Eastern students shares certain similarities with the United States but has also some fundamental differences (Miller 1984). For example the scope and depth of prejudicial attitudes, and behavior is much more limited than that generally reported for blacks and whites in the United States (Bizman and Amir, 1984). There is no tradition of racism or discrimination between Jewish ethnic groups (Miller, 1984). One would expect, therefore, that intergroup tension accompanying school desegregation in Israel would be

much less than in the United States. Indeed, there were no instances of rioting or other forms of violence following government-sponsored school integration programs (Halper, Shokeid, Weingrod, 1984).

Moreover, potential pressure and opposition by Western middle- class parents or extensive involvement of parents in curriculum matters and standards were diffused by maintaining the schools' middle-class Western orientation. Parents of Western origin whose children were to be integrated with Middle-Eastern children were assured by the Ministry of Education that academic standards would not be lowered. Furthermore, it was assumed that Western culture attitudes and behavior patterns would continue to serve as models to be adopted by the Middle-Easterners (Iram, 1987).

Indeed, in a comparative study of school desegregation in the United States and Israel, Miller concludes: "...it seems likely that Israeli education faces less parental resistance and political opposition than does desegregation of blacks and hispanics in the United States" (1984, p. 249).

Nevertheless, school desegregation in Israel did at times provoke antagonism by parents who opposed to the policy of using their children in neighbourhood schools as means to attain socio- economic equality. (Adler, 1984; Halper, Shokeid and Weingrod, 1984). However, this intensified involvement was contained at the school or local levels, but not on the national level.

Supplementary Programmes

The State Education Law of 1953 (Stanner, 1963, p.168-179) abolished the politically oriented division of the Israeli schools into four "trends". This organisational and pedagogical linkage of education with political parties was an heritage of the pre-state past, which obtained legal status in the Compulsory Education Law of 1949 (Stanner, 1963, p.150-162).

The amendments of the 1953 law resulted in all official schools being divided into two categories, "State Education" and "Religious State Education" (Section 3).

State Education is defined by the 1963 law as "education provided by the state on the basis of the curriculum prescribed by the Minister of Education and Culture, without attachment to a party or communal body or any other organization outside the Government and under the supervision of the Minister or a person authorised by him in that behalf." The law entitles parents of children liable to compulsory attendanc to opt between "state education" and "religious state education". The latter is defined as "State education with the distinction that its institutions are religious as to their way of life, curriculum, teachers and inspectors." (Section 1).

The State Education Law has authorised the Minister of Education and Culture to prescribe to all schools within the purview of compulsory education a uniform and obligatory curriculum (Section 4). Further, Section 6 of the Law authorises the Minister to prescribe or approve on the demand of the parents a "supplementary programme". However, these programmes are to comprise no more than 25 percent of the total number of weekly lesson periods in any given class. He may also approve an "Additional Programme" on the demand of parents "provided that all expenditure involved in implementing the additional programme shall be borne by the parents... or by the local education authority which has undertaken to defray it" (Section 8).

These two provisions of the law, the "Additional Programme" and particularly the "Supplementary Programme" were designed to offer parents, individual schools and communities, freedom of choice to determine 25 percent of the curriculum. However, until 1977 no supplementary programmes have been prescribed or approved by the Minister at all. The records of the Ministry of Education and Culture do not show any application by parents to exercise this particular right. Possible explanations for the reluctanc of parents to get involved in determining the curriculum are as follows:

1. The "Regulations Concerning Supplementary Curriculum and Additional Curriculum" (Stanner, 204-8) issued by the Ministry are complicated and therefore deterant. They require a signed consent by at least seventy five percent of the parents, the principal

and then by the Minister who has to be convinced that the "proposed supplementary curriculum has... the same instructional and educational value as the other approved supplementary curricula..." namely the remaining 25 percent which is also prescribed by the ministry (Section 4).

2. The Ministry of Education and Culture did not encourage parents to make use of this provision.
3. Most of the parents are not aware of their right according to this provision. Indeed, a study conducted in 1976 showed that 94 percent of the parents surveyed did not know about this provision (Epstein, 1976).
4. The reluctance of parents to get involved in curricular matters. Although 68 percent of the parents surveyed were not satisfied with the education their children get in school only one third of them expressed a desire to get "involved in the curriculum" (Epstein, 1976).

As of 1977 there is a tendency to more direct involvement of parents in curricular matters. Indeed, in recent years several state and religious state schools were established to take advantage of the "supplementary programmes" provision to stress special characteristics whether social-ideological or religious- cultural.

This trend might gather momentum by a most recent declared policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture: " The Autonomy of the Educational Institution" designed to grant more pedagogic and administrative independence to every single school (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1986). This policy is a departure from the centralised educational policy which characterised the Israeli educational system. The Minister of Education and Culture has stated this policy as follows:

'The Ministry encourages and will continue to encourage every expression of involvement of parents in the educational system. The more the parents are involved the better is the school' (Israel Parent Association, 1986).

To what extent these stated policies will encourage parents' involvement in the actual educational process of their children and particularly in curricular decision making, remains to be seen.

Discussion.

Parents interact with schools as a pressure group (Thomas, 1983). Indeed, parents' involvement in the educational system was very high and intensive before the establishment of the state. This was partly because of the political oriented "trends" system of education, which was characterized by a high degree of community involvement including political parties, ideological groups, as well as parents and teachers. It is assumed that the decline in parents' involvement is due to a general decline in ideology following the establishment of the state (Eisenstadt, 1967).

The state's centralized responsability for educational policy minimizes the personal responsability. The bearaucratic centralized structure of the educational system, contributes to feelings of powerlessness and apathy.

Thus involvement of parents as a pressure group is sporadic, mainly during the opening of the scholar year, not systematic and not persistent. They usually organise ad-hoc to deal with a pressing issue, and act very intensively to solve the problem and then dissolve.

Another characteristic of parents' involvement is in regard to the physical conditions of schools: buildings, crowded classes, heating of classes in winter, bussing, transfer of students from one institution to another and other organisational issues.

Parents' associations operate on three levels: the national, local and institutional. On the institutional level, parents' associations serve usually as means to secure resources and pressuring local politicians for more services. The socioeconomic status of the parents involved, has a major role on the style and efficiency of the activity. Parents of middle and upper-middle class groups have more influence because of personal contacts and knowledge of how to influence the bureaucracy (Thomas, 1983). However, the higher the expectations

of the parents from lower socio-economic groups, the more their feelings of deprivation and frustration and the greater their eagerness to complain and to exert pressure. This is evident in "development towns" in Israel and in inner-city poverty neighbourhoods whose population is mainly of Oriental immigrants origin. These groups are backed by local and national politicians.

While parents associations on the institutional level are authentic representatives of their clientele and express their interests, parents associations on the local and national levels have political interests which sometimes do not represent the real interest of the parents.

In recent years, parents exert pressure in the area of dessegregation, sometimes opposing the policy of school integration. However there are few attempts to influence the curriculum contents, aims and methods as well as teaching staff and principals. Although the law recognises the parents right to determine 25 percent of the curriculum within the"supplementary programme"provision, parents have refrained from materialising this right except in a few cases in recent years. The most notable examples are the founding of traditional non-orthodox schools, reinforcement of Judaic studies in certain Religeous State schools on the demand of parents as well as the founding of a school which intends to impart to its students the "Labour Movement Values". (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1981).

Conclusions

The patterns of parents involvement in schools need to be transformed radically. In most of the schools and particularly in "development towns" and in inner-city neighbourhood schools there is a one way authoritative-paternalistic relationship between parents and schools. Such attitudes do not encourage meaningful involvement of parents nor do they bring about a constructive dialogue between the two partners - parents and teachers.

Indeed a committee appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture recom-

mended changing the pattern of parents involvement in four directions.

"1. Training of teachers to work with parents and strengthen their awareness of its importance.

2. Democratization within the school towards more cooperation between the two partners in providing leadership and in the operation of the school.

3. Formalising the patterns of interaction between the teaching staff and the parents.

4. Encouraging the parents to organise within the school, the educational community, the local community and on the national level. It is the school's responsibility to encourage parents' initiative wherever it exists and to initiate parents involvement." (Education in Israel in the Eighties, 1976, 407- 408).

It is believed that intensified and meaningful parents' involvement in schools might enhance the pluralistic nature of the Israeli society, strengthen its democracy and enrich the education of all children.

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